

## **Rhetorical Devices Used by Simon Sinek When Delivering an Inspirational Speech**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study focuses on finding out the rhetorical devices used by Simon Sinek when delivering an inspirational speech and how they affect Simon Sinek's inspirational speech. In this study, the writer used Harris' (2018) theory of rhetorical question and Gregory's (2018) theory of general purposes of speech to analyze the data. The writer employed a descriptive qualitative approach. The findings showed that Simon Sinek uses alliteration, parallelism, antithesis, and simile when delivering his speech. The missing device is metaphor because metaphor allows different interpretations, decreases the level of clarity in a speech. Each rhetorical devices affects the speech differently. Alliteration affects the speech using melody; parallelism with repetition and rhythm; antithesis with contrast, complexity, balance, and emphasis; and simile with vivid image, sense of familiarity, and clarity. Ultimately, rhetorical devices affect the inspirational speech in a positive way as they help amplify the meaning of the speech.

**Keywords:** Simon Sinek; inspirational speech; rhetorical devices

### **INTRODUCTION**

A speech is "a form of utterance that widely used to share opinion and at the same time to influence people about significant issues" (Valiantien, 2015, p. 47). The speaker will be able to create a clear and appealing speech if the language used in the speech is properly chosen. This will assist the speaker in effectively attracting the attention of the audience to a certain topic. Rhetorical devices can be used as a helpful tool to persuade and convince the listeners (Valiantien, 2015). In addition, rhetorical devices are useful to make communication powerful, more interesting, clearer, and sometimes funnier (Harris, 2018). Since the writer wants to research about rhetorical devices used in speeches, the writer wants to analyze speeches from a person who is a professional in the field of public speaking. The writer's choice falls to Simon Sinek and the reasons why he is chosen for this research will be explained below.

Simon Sinek is a motivational speaker and leadership coach who was born on October 9, 1973, in Wimbledon, and currently resides in the United States of America. After working with various famous advertising agencies such as Ogilvy & Mather and Havas Creative, he decided to launch Sinek Partners, his own business firm. Gradually, he built his career as a motivational speaker and leadership coach ("Simon Sinek," n.d.).

Simon Sinek is a famous business motivational speaker and leadership coach. Up until December 9th, 2021, he has 1.41 million subscribers on his own YouTube channel (Simon Sinek), 843.236 followers on his Twitter account (@simonsinek), and 1.4 million followers on his Instagram account (simonsinek) He has been invited to give speeches in famous organizations, such as the United Nations and the United States Air Force (Hensel, 2015). As for his career as a leadership coach, he has coached several big companies such as 3M, Microsoft, Intel, and others. He does not only coach their employees, but also their leaders ("Simon Sinek," n.d.). Based on those achievements, the writer decides to choose Simon Sinek as the subject for this research.

According to Gregory (2018), there are three types of speeches: to inform; to persuade; to entertain. Inside entertaining speech, there are multiple branches of entertaining speech, and one of them is inspirational speech. Establishing the purpose of speech is essential because it can bring the topic under control (Gregory, 2018). The writer only uses inspirational speech because a motivational speaker often aims to motivate or inspire his/her audience, thus making motivational/inspirational speeches Simon Sinek's specialty. After watching some Simon Sinek's speeches in YouTube, the writer will use one speech for the inspirational purpose because the video met the criteria stated in section 1.5. The writer will explain the reasoning behind the categorization of Simon Sinek's speech below.

The speech is titled "Simon Sinek's Life Advice Will Change Your Future (MUST WATCH)" (<https://bit.ly/33h4hJN>), and according to Gregory (2018), this can be classified as an inspirational speech. Up until December 9th, 2021, the speech has been viewed by 4,124,753 people on YouTube, and it lasts 39 minutes and 23 seconds. The reason is because this speech can make people feel encouraged and uplifted (Gregory, 2018). In this speech, Simon encourages his listeners to be confident because in confidence, people will naturally help others and it will build trust (Madness, 2018). In addition, Simon also encourages his listeners to start doing little things for others, because by doing that, they can be the source of inspiration for others and in the end, they will feel a sense of fulfillment (Madness, 2018).

Although this speech can be classified as an inspirational speech, it does not mean that other purposes are abandoned. For example, in the very beginning of the speech, Sinek said, "So here's a little issue we have in America today. There are currently about 250,000 people a year who are dying in our hospitals due to preventable deaths" This utterance indicates that Sinek wants to inform his audience about an issue in America, thus indicating it is an element from informative speech. Ultimately, there is no pure informative, persuasive, entertaining, or inspirational speech, because using other elements from other types of speech can make an effective speech, and obviously, any public speaker will use other elements to make their speech effective and impactful.

There are some reasons why the writer chooses the speech above. First, the speech's duration matched with the range proposed by Ivey (2018). As mentioned by Ivey (2021), the ideal duration for a speech is 20 until 40 minutes to keep the audience engaged. The speech duration is 39 minutes and 23 seconds. However, the writer will only use the video until the duration of 22 minutes. This is because the rest of the video is Q&A session, so it is not needed for this study. Second, the writer also considers view count as a factor in choosing the speeches because the writer argues that if the view count is high, there must be something special about the video, so a lot of people watch it, and the speech has 4,124,753 million views (Madness, 2018). The writer sees that the video meet those two criteria and decided to use them as the source of data. While establishing a general purpose will help the speech's topic under control (Gregory, 2018), it is also important to add rhetorical devices to a speech. The writer will focus on five rhetorical devices for this research, and those five rhetorical devices are alliteration, parallelism, antithesis, simile, and metaphor (Gregory, 2018). The reason why the writer selects alliteration, parallelism, and antithesis rhetorical devices is because according to Gregory (2018), these are the top three of the most popular rhetorical devices used in speeches. Besides, these rhetorical devices can be used to create a rhythm to amplify the impact of the words (Lucas, 2012). The writer also chooses simile and metaphor because of their effectiveness in creating mental images (Gregory, 2018).

Establishing purposes of speech is beneficial to keep the topic under control (Gregory, 2018), and by using rhetorical devices, a speaker can make the speech powerful, more interesting, clearer, and funnier (Harris, 2018). This should mean that different purposes of speech require rhetorical devices to make the topic effective and interesting for the listeners. Therefore, the

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writer wants to conduct a study about the rhetorical devices used by Simon Sinek in inspirational speech, and how they affect Simon Sinek's inspirational speech.

### **METHODS**

The writer used a descriptive qualitative approach. The data was taken from Simon Sinek's utterances when he delivers the speech. In the data collection, first, the writer watched the speech video and then downloaded it. Second, the writer re-watched the video and transcribed the utterances in the video using automatic subtitle generator. The writer wrote what the subtitle generator displays, but the writer also double checked the transcription to provide better accuracy. Third, the writer marked Simon Sinek's utterances individually. For the utterance, the writer will use the format I-1. The first letter represents the inspirational (I) speech. As for the second number, it represents Simon Sinek's utterance. For instance, the writer writes I-17. It means that this utterance comes from the inspirational speech, and this is Simon Sinek's 17th utterance. Last, the writer analyzed the utterances produced by Simon Sinek based on Harris' (2018) theory of rhetorical devices.

### **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

This section discusses the findings of the study, and the writer answers the research questions in two parts.

#### **Rhetorical Devices Used by Simon Sinek in His Inspirational Speech**

In this section, the writer discusses the rhetorical devices that was found in Simon Sinek's informative speech. The writer found out that alliteration, parallelism, antithesis, and simile were found in the speech, but the writer cannot find any metaphor in the speech.

The first rhetorical device that the writer discusses is alliteration. Alliteration is a rhetorical devices formed by putting similar sounds in the beginning of successive words (Harris, 2018). The writer discovered that alliteration is used by Sinek in his speech.

The usage of alliteration can be seen in utterance I-29, "The **feeling from fulfillment** comes from the exertion of time and energy for someone else" Another usage of alliteration can be seen in utterance I-35, "You know sex feels good so that will do it so we can **procreate and perpetuate** the species, but we're social animals ....." According to Harris (2018), these examples are considered as alliteration because the similar sound is repeated at the beginning of successive words, and both of them are intervened by a word. In utterance I-29, the "f" from "feeling" is succeeded by another "f" from "fulfillment" and they are intervened by the word "from", and it is the same with utterance I-35.

The second rhetorical device used by Simon Sinek is parallelism. Parallelism can be described as a rhetorical devices that was formed by putting several equally important ideas to the same grammatical structure (Harris, 2018). In this speech, the writer found that parallelism is used by Sinek in his inspirational speech, and the writer will show some examples of it.

Parallelism is detected in utterance I-63, "**You have capacity, you have strength, you have talent, you have ability** ....." According to Harris (2018), this is a parallelism because there are three sentence parts being paralleled together, and they are using the same form (You have...). On the utterance I-63, the parts that being paralleled are the objects, however, for the utterance I-10, "**cancer goes up, heart disease goes up, diabetes goes up** ....." the paralleled parts are the subjects. So, this shows that parallelism is flexible as the speaker can choose whatever elements that want to be paralleled.

Another form of parallelism can be observed in utterance I-75, **“It's your responsibility to help others and it's others responsibility to help you find yours.”** This can be classified as parallelism because the entire sentence is being paralleled (Harris, 2018). There are two clauses in that sentence and Sinek uses similar grammatical form to make them equal in terms of structure.

The third rhetorical device is antithesis. Antithesis is formed by putting opposite ideas in one parallel structure (Harris, 2018). The writer discovered that Sinek uses antithesis in his inspirational speech, and the writer will discuss the usage of antithesis in Sinek's speech below. The usage of antithesis can be seen in utterance I-41, **“..... so the feeling people get is that I did something for you, and you did nothing for me. You replaced it .....**” This example can be classified as antithesis because, Sinek puts two opposite ideas in one parallel sentence (Harris, 2018). Notice that the first clause is a positive clause and the second is a negative clause with totally different opposite meaning, and when combined into a sentence, the contrast is visible and it becomes the antithesis. It is the same with utterance I-49, **“..... you might do something for someone else and they may not do something back for you .....**” The positive clause is combined with negative clause to create an antithesis, however, for utterance I-49, it does not make the entire sentence as it only makes for a part of the full sentence.

Another usage of antithesis can be seen in utterance I-77 **“In the military, they give medals to people who are willing to sacrifice themselves so that others may gain. In business, we are willing to give bonuses to people who will sacrifice others so that we may gain”** This one is special because Sinek does not put opposite clauses to form a full sentence, but he puts two opposite sentences in a parallel way (Harris, 2018), so it is totally different from previous examples. Nevertheless, this example is still considered as an antithesis because of the conflicting idea in the utterance itself (Military: give medals for self-sacrifice, Business: give bonuses for sacrificing others).

The fourth rhetorical device that is used by Simon Sinek is simile. Simile is formed by comparing two superficially unrelated things with at least a similar attribute (Harris, 2018). The writer discovered that Sinek uses simile in his inspirational speech, and the discussion of the usage of simile by Sinek will be discussed below.

Simile is visible in utterance I-6, **“Hospitals are run like businesses .....**” The word “like” is usually used when someone wants to compare a noun with another noun (Harris, 2018). In this example, two nouns are being compared (hospitals and businesses) in terms of how both are run. Since the introductory word is visible and the comparison is also visible, it is concluded that this is a simile.

In certain circumstances, the simile's subject and picture are so different that the point of comparison is lost until further information is explained (Harris, 2018). The example of this case is utterance I-46, **“And what they say is the first two weeks of boot camp, everybody is there to outdo each other, and prove that they're strong. Just kind of like when we start in a job with proof we want to show how great we are, we'll work a little hard, it will do good work, look how good my design is, right? It's all about us and how good we are, right?”** This is considered as a simile as the phrase “just kind of like” acts as introduction to the comparison. In this example, Sinek tries to compare two weeks in boot camp, and when people start their job. Further explanation of the subject and image is needed to provide clarity and avoid confusion (Harris, 2018).

The last rhetorical device is metaphor. As stated in the beginning of this section, the writer does not find any metaphor in Sinek's inspirational speech. This is interesting because metaphor is one of the rhetorical devices that is considered to be effective in creating imagery (Gregory,

2018), yet the writer cannot find any metaphor in Sinek's speech. It could be that metaphor has a weakness, which is to allow different interpretations (Douglas, 2020).

### **How the Rhetorical Devices Affect Simon Sinek's Inspirational Speech**

In this section, the writer discusses how the rhetorical devices affect Simon Sinek's inspirational speech, and the roles of each rhetorical device in this speech. The findings show that rhetorical devices affect the inspirational speech with their own different ways. However, they have similar goals; to highlight; underscore; and emphasize the message of Simon Sinek. With those goals in sight, the speaker is able to create a memorable, yet an inspirational speech. Alliteration is the first to be discussed. Harris (2018) states that the function of alliteration is to highlight important points so the audience can remember those vital ideas. The writer finds out that alliteration uses melody to emphasize or highlight the important points of Sinek's inspirational speech. This is also in line with what Wood (2018) said about alliteration, that alliteration utilizes melody or rhythm to capture the audience's attention, and enable the audience to easily remember the ideas. For example, in utterance I-29, Sinek said, "The **feeling from fulfillment** comes from the exertion of time and energy for someone else" The entire sentence becomes easy to remember because Sinek uses three combinations of words that begin with the letter 'f', creating a melody or rhythm that makes the message delivered by Sinek understood better by the audience. It is also an important note that this phrase is essential in Sinek's speech since how to feel fulfilled is one of the main topics in his speech, so, if he has carved this phrase into the audience's mind, this can make the speech memorable for the audience.

Another example of the use of alliteration is in utterance I-35. In this utterance, Sinek said, "You know sex feels good so that will do it so we can **procreate and perpetuate** the species....." In this utterance, Sinek uses alliteration to emphasize the true function of sexual intercourse to his audience. This is important because in the next utterance, Sinek said, "And so when we do good for others and we look out for those in our tribe, we look out for those in our group, it actually feels good" which means that he equates the purpose of having sexual intercourse and helping others. The ultimate goal of these two activities is to ensure the survival of the human race. By having sexual intercourse, humans can procreate so the species will not be extinct, and by helping others, humans increase their chance of survivability. In the end, Sinek uses alliteration to highlight the true meaning of sexual intercourse for humans, so in the end he can equalize it to the true meaning of helping others.

The second rhetorical device in discussion is parallelism. Harris (2018) states that parallelism is useful to create clarity, rhythm, balance, and elegance in a sentence, helping the speaker to emphasize important points. The writer finds out that parallelism uses repetition and rhythm to affect the speech. The writer shows the utterance I-63 as an example for the discussion. In that utterance, Sinek said, "**You have capacity, you have strength, you have talent, you have ability** ....." This utterance has two elements that the writer said before; repetition and rhythm. Creating equally important ideas with the same grammatical form (you have....) and then the form is repeated four times, causing the sentence to have a rhythm, resulting in the main idea (You are more talented than you think) becoming emphasized to the audience. As a result, the audience becomes motivated and inspired from hearing Sinek's words because the utterance has the rhythm and several positive ideas are repeated in the same grammatical form.

From the writer's perspective, parallelism also helps in conveying the idea of the speaker to the audience. The example can be seen in utterance I-44 when Sinek said, "The Marines have a thing called the obstacle course and this is where they they build **anaerobic strength and aerobic strength, muscle strength**....." In this utterance, Sinek wants to explain the purpose of the obstacle course to the audience. Actually Sinek can just explain the purpose of an obstacle course to his audience, but with the help of parallelism, which has repetition and

rhythm, the message becomes clear and when conveyed, the audience can better understand what Sinek is talking about. With parallelism, Sinek does not have to explain the purpose of an obstacle course, which can make the speech boring. Instead, by listing what kind of strengths are being trained using parallelism, the explanation itself becomes memorable for the audience. Antithesis is the third rhetorical device to be discussed in this section. According to Harris (2018), antithesis' role is to create contrast, complexity, balance, and emphasis. Antithesis juxtaposed two contrasting ideas (Wood, 2019) and during that juxtaposition, the previous four elements are created. The writer uses utterance I-77 as the example of how antithesis affect Sinek's inspirational speech. In that utterance, Sinek said, "**In the military, they give medals to people who are willing to sacrifice themselves so that others may gain. In business, we are willing to give bonuses to people who will sacrifice others so that we may gain**" In this utterance, the contrast is shown because Sinek distinguishes the world view of the military and business world. By showing the contrast, this creates the sense of complexity in the audience's mind, and emphasizes the idea that the world view of military and business are different, and in case of the business world, the view should be swapped so it will be the same with the military ones, as Sinek said in utterance I-78, "We have it backwards" Sinek is able to convey the idea in utterance I-78 because he has emphasized the difference of two contrasting ideas, and by deliver a conclusion, the audience finally understand the final message Sinek wants to deliver.

Another example of how antithesis works can be observed in utterance I-86, in which Sinek said, "**He won't give to charity because he sees me put a dollar in a cup, but he will actually help someone because he saw someone also helps someone**" Sinek uses antithesis in this utterance to reinforce and emphasize his idea about helping others. This time, helping others can be seen as a tool to motivate or inspire other people to help others too. For the context, in previous utterances, Sinek tells his audience about his personal experience about he and his friend helped picked up some papers that fell from someone's bag. After that, another person commented their action by saying this, "I saw you help that guy, that was really cool" This means that Sinek and his friend's action has inspired another person to do the same, and that is what Sinek wants to say to his audience. By using antithesis, Sinek can create a contrast between only giving money and doing action to others. The writer thinks that the contrast created by the usage of antithesis can highlight the difference of only giving money to someone and actually doing an action. Ultimately, this can inspire Sinek's audience to help others because by helping others, they can inspire other people to do the same, and it can fulfill other person's life too.

Simile is the fourth rhetorical device in this discussion. The main function of simile is to create vivid image, sense of familiarity, and clarity (Harris, 2018). All of those are used to make an idea easily understandable by the audience through imagery. The writer uses utterance I-6 as an example of how simile affects the speech. In that utterance, Sinek said, "**Hospitals are run like businesses** ....." In this utterance, Sinek compares hospitals with businesses because he wants to make sure the audience understand exactly what he is talking about. In the previous utterance, Sinek said that only five percent of hospital administrators are the doctors, and the rest is number crunchers or statisticians. This condition is comparable with how businesses are run by the statisticians to make sure the business gain profits. It creates a sense of familiarity because most people know how businesses are run, but most people may do not know how a hospital works, and finally, the audience get a vivid image of the idea of "Hospitals are run like businesses" Thus, this creates clarity because now, the audience finally knows what Sinek wants to deliver.

Another example of how Sinek uses simile can be seen in utterance I-59, in which Sinek said, "**That's like your parents telling you when you're young, "I know you're stupid, figure it out", right?"**" In this utterance, Sinek compares the idea of "Doing more with less" with parents say, "I know you're stupid, figure it out" This comparison creates a sense of familiarity since

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the audience can imagine their parents says that line. Also, the comparison itself makes sense because the idea of “doing more with less” is compared with “a dumb kid must be able to solve a problem” Of course, the kid won’t be able to solve a problem because that kid does not have the capacity to do that. The sense of familiarity then creates vivid image, and because the audience finally understand what Sinek means with “Doing more with less”, this creates clarity in the audience’s mind.

The last rhetorical device is metaphor. Douglas (2020) stated that metaphor allows different interpretations. In literature, this can be seen as a strength since the reader is free to interpret the meaning of the work. However, for a speech, this can be seen as a weakness since the information delivered to the audience has to be clear. Metaphor is a rhetorical device to create imagery, and if the imagery failed to create clarity in the audience’s mind, it will confuse the audience. That’s why Sinek uses simile, because as stated by Douglas (2020), simile gives the audience an example and highlight a specific meaning. By using simile, the speaker is able to erase confusion in the audience’s mind when it comes to creating imagery since the meaning itself is already specific, so the audience does not need to interpret the meaning of the speaker’s idea differently.

## CONCLUSION

To conclude, rhetorical devices are important for inspirational speech as they help the speaker solve different problems. Rhetorical devices are indeed affect the speech in a positive way, as they help Simon Sinek to convey his messages, and to highlight, underscore, and emphasize the message of Simon Sinek. Since the present research was a small case based on inspirational speech, further research regarding the rhetorical devices in other types of speech is recommended. A research using different types of rhetorical devices is also advised. Despite the limitations, hopefully, the research can explain the usage of rhetorical devices in inspirational speech and how those rhetorical devices affect the inspirational speech itself.

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